10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

141 Young people of both sexes are attractive and robust
[146] but hard work, undernourishment and, in the case of the women, constant child-bearing often make them appear old when they have only reached what should be the prime of life.

591 Family life among the Karens is not unlike that of
428 the ordinary European family. They do not have the
596 patriarchial family system of the Chinese, and each married couple usually has its own house in which to live. Often the woman brings her young husband to live with her parents and he inherits their lands on their decease.

582 Marriage in the early days was strictly within the tribe.
163 Even marriage with those of other Karen tribes was looked
165 down upon. Karen women usually bear as many as ten or more children, but often raise less than half of them,
858 due to their lack of knowledge of sanitation. Karen
888 fathers are usually fond of their children and take as good care of them as they know how. Their love is generally sentimental and children are allowed to rule the household. Old people usually receive good care for the Karens always reverence age.

IV

OCCUPATIONS

243 In the early days the Karens were concerned with
433 wresting a living for themselves from the ground where they lived. Almost without exception they were cultivators of the soil and raised rice, their principal food. They followed the two methods usually found in Burma, the mountain method in the hills and the paddy-field method on the plains.

243 In the hills the wasteful way of cultivating rice was that of clearing a section, called in Burmese a *taung-ya*,

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

CHAPTER XVIII

BIRTH CUSTOMS, CHILDHOOD

Birth Customs

843 Among the Sgaw Karen in the Pegu Hills and on the plains there appear to be but few special customs connected with the births of children. Offspring are desired, and a large family gives joy to the parents. A pregnant woman experiences but little lightening of her usual tasks and works up to the time of her delivery. The prospective mother is expected to omit bitter herbs and fruits from her diet, as these are thought to be harmful to her; while her husband avoids having his hair cut during her pregnancy, lest it should bring ill-luck and shorten the life of the child.

844 Old women usually serve as midwives and are sometimes believed to possess considerable skill in aiding delivery, although they are without special training for the function they perform. Custom is too deeply ingrained for them to profit much from their own experience. They resort to massage to hasten the birth, and in stubborn cases they tread upon the abdomen to expel the foetus. They believe in aiding nature rather than in letting nature take its own course, even in normal cases. For her services the midwife receives a rupee and a bundle of dried bark for the preparation of a head-washing solution ("t' yaw"). She uses the solution to prevent the eruption of some sort of itching skin-disease, after which she [845] anoints herself with sandal wood. In case the delivery should be abnormal, the midwife would receive double wages. If the labors are unduly prolonged and she can not bring things to pass, she sends for a soothsayer or a medicine-man, who usually gives the suffering woman little else than a cup of charmed water ("hti th' mu").

● 165 845 When a woman dies before the child is delivered, it must be extracted before the funeral ceremonies are performed. In case this can not be conveniently done at the time, the operation is postponed until the body is carried to the place of burning or burial, the foetus being then removed through an incision in the abdomen. This operation is thought necessary, in order to prevent the reincarna-

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

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tion of the spirit of the woman from having a deformity in the abdomen.

If the child survives its birth, the umbilical cord and the placenta are wrapped in a cloth or placed in a bamboo joint, and buried in the ground or hung up in a tree. If the latter disposition is made of them, a large tree of one of the hardiest varieties is selected for the purpose, in order that the babe may gain strength therefrom.

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Soon after the child is born offerings are presented to the spirit, and a string is tied around the child's wrist to keep its "k' la" from being enticed away. In some cases the cord is tied around the neck and loins as well as the wrist. These threads may be of scarlet to dazzle the eyes of the demons and prevent their seeing the "k' la" of the infant.[1] In Toungoo it is also customary to provide new cooking pots, water buckets, mats, knives, and a new ladder to the house, to render it more difficult for the spirits to find the child. Among the Brecs the husband goes into seclusion for seven days, during which he must speak to no one. He alone cares for the mother and child. Nobody is permitted to enter the house. Among the Padaungs the period of the husband's retirement is a month, and during a month and a half the whole family must live on rice roasted in bamboo joints, boiled rice being tabu. Although the villagers may not speak to the couple, the women are expected to brew a special liquor for their use during this period.[2] It is usual in these tribes for father and child to perform in pantomime the work that the child will be expected to do when it grows up. For example, the child's hand is put to a miniature hoe, with which the father strikes the ground. Dr. Mason speaks of this as taking place when the father returns from disposing of the placenta, but Dr. Bunker refers to it as coming later, when the father holds a feast for the child.[3] On the third day after the birth the father goes on a hunting expedition, the outcome of which is thought to indicate the relative success of the child's life. On the father's return from the hunt the child is bathed to remove all spiritual defilement from it, whereupon the father waves a splint of bamboo downwards over the infant's arm, as if fanning him, and

[1] *Cf.* Dr. Alonzo Bunker, *Soo Tha*, 21.

[2] *Cf. Notes on the Bwe Expedition*, by Capt. Cuynder (Rangoon, 1894); also *Notes on the Bwe and Padaung Countries*, by Lieut. R. W. Carrick (Rangoon, 1896). These are Government publications.

[3] Mason in *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1866; Bunker, *Soo Tha*, p. 21.